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СЕМИУРОВНЕВАЯ МОДЕЛЬ ОЦЕНКИ РАЗВИТИЯ КРИТИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА СТУДЕНТОВ В ОБУЧЕНИИ ИСТОРИИ ИСКУССТВА

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Аннотация

В статье представлена семиуровневая система развития критического дискурса студентов (Student Critical Discourse Development System, SCDDS), предназначенная для оценки развития критического дискурса студентов в университетском обучении истории искусства. Модель переводит качественные изменения в письменной интерпретации произведений и художественно-исторических явлений в систему наблюдаемых дискурсивных, языковых и эпистемологических показателей. Методологическую основу составили критический дискурс-анализ, теория оценки, модели эпистемологического развития и исследования диалогического обучения; дополнительно учтены актуальные публикации 2023–2026 гг. по кодированию учебного диалога, критическому письму и оцениванию в художественном образовании. Результатом исследования стала шкала из семи уровней: описательного, экспозиционного, аналитического, сравнительного, оценочного, критического и конструктивного дискурса. Выделены три качественных перехода: от называния к анализу, от применения аналитической рамки к ее проблематизации и от критики существующих рамок к построению синтетической позиции. Предложенная модель рассматривает уровень как характеристику конкретного текста в определенной учебной задаче, допускает межуровневые колебания и может применяться для продольного анализа письменных работ, формирующего оценивания и диагностики ближайшего направления развития критического дискурса.

Ключевые слова: критический дискурс; история искусства; художественное образование; критическое мышление; оценка дискурса; теория оценки; эпистемологическое развитие; академическое письмо; диалогическое обучение

A SEVEN-LEVEL MODEL FOR ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' CRITICAL DISCOURSE IN ART HISTORY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the seven-level Student Critical Discourse Development System (SCDDS) for assessing the development of students' critical discourse in university art history education. The model converts qualitative changes in written interpretation of artworks and art-historical phenomena into observable discourse, linguistic, and epistemological indicators. Its methodological basis combines Critical Discourse Analysis, Appraisal Theory, models of epistemological development, and research on dialogic teaching, supplemented by studies published in 2023–2026 on classroom-discourse coding, critical writing, and assessment in arts education. The research result is a seven-level scale comprising descriptive, expository, analytical, comparative, evaluative, critical, and constructive discourse. Three qualitative thresholds are identified: naming to analysis, application of an analytical framework to interrogation of its assumptions, and critique of existing frameworks to construction of a synthetic position. The model treats a level as a property of performance in a particular text and task, allows cross-level variation, and supports longitudinal analysis of student writing. Its principal contribution is the alignment of linguistic evidence with epistemological operations, which enables researchers and teachers to distinguish terminological knowledge from analysis, comparison from framework questioning, and criticism from metacritical synthesis.

Keywords: critical discourse; art history education; critical thinking; discourse assessment; Appraisal Theory; epistemological development; academic writing; dialogic teaching; SCDDS

INTRODUCTION

Art history education requires students to transform visual perception into disciplined interpretation. Description of scale, color, symmetry, spatial organization, iconography, or technique provides an initial layer of evidence, while advanced work connects formal features with historical conditions, compares interpretive frameworks, justifies judgments, and examines the assumptions carried by analytical concepts. Assessment therefore needs criteria that distinguish qualitative changes in student reasoning without reducing criticality to vocabulary density, factual recall, textual length, or stylistic confidence.

A discourse-based approach offers a suitable basis for this task because language participates in the construction and negotiation of knowledge. N. Fairclough treats discourse as a form of social practice and links linguistic choices with broader relations of knowledge and power [1, p. 51]. J. R. Martin and P. R. R. White provide a complementary linguistic perspective through Appraisal Theory, especially the distinction between monoglossic and heteroglossic positioning [2, p. 100]. For art-historical writing, these concepts help distinguish categorical assertion from evidence-based interpretation, engagement with alternative positions, and explicit critique of the framework through which an artwork is interpreted.

Models of epistemological development add a developmental coordinate. P. M. King and K. S. Kitchener describe seven stages of reflective judgment that differ in their treatment of knowledge, evidence, uncertainty, and justification [3, p. 44]. W. G. Perry traces a related movement from dependence on authoritative certainty toward contextualized judgment and commitment under conditions of uncertainty [4, p. 10]. The Student Critical Discourse Development System (SCDDS) uses these models as reference points while keeping the written

text as the direct object of assessment. A level characterizes demonstrated performance in a specific task and can vary across topics, evidence bases, and instructional conditions.

Research on classroom dialogue supports the use of observable discourse operations as developmental evidence. N. Mercer associates exploratory talk with explicit reasoning, constructive challenge, and public accountability of claims [5, p. 153]. Y. Tao and G. Chen, reviewing 32 empirical studies of dialogic teaching, identified recurrent coding indicators related to sharing, articulating, and building on contributions [6, p. 1]. R. Cui and P. Teo likewise show that dialogic moves can elicit and extend critical thinking in classroom interaction [7, p. 1]. These findings justify a coding logic based on what students actually accomplish with language rather than on global impressions of participation.

Recent work also connects linguistic positioning with critical academic writing and arts assessment. I. Pradita, A. Sutrisno, and T. D. Hardjanto use Appraisal Theory as instructional scaffolding and report stronger evaluative positioning and source engagement among undergraduate writers [8, p. 22]. J. Baggott-Brown examines inclusive assessment of historical and critical studies in an arts degree programme, drawing attention to the relationship between academic writing and artistic practice [9, p. 145]. F.-A. Norton approaches critical thinking through arts-based research competences in higher education in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Spain [10, p. 142]. Together, these studies reinforce the need for an assessment model that is linguistically explicit, developmentally ordered, and sensitive to the interpretive character of arts learning.

The aim of the study is to construct and explicate a seven-level model for assessing students' critical discourse in art history education and to identify the qualitative thresholds separating adjacent developmental zones. The object of assessment is written art-historical discourse; the subject is the relation among observable linguistic choices, argumentative operations, and epistemological positioning. The study applies theoretical synthesis, comparative conceptual analysis, and operationalization. Critical Discourse Analysis supplies the social and ideological dimension, Appraisal Theory supplies indicators of stance and dialogic positioning, epistemological-development models organize changes in assumptions about knowledge, and dialogic-education research supports the treatment of reasoning as observable discourse practice.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The principal research result is the Student Critical Discourse Development System (SCDDS), an ordinal seven-level model extending from L1 Descriptive Discourse to L7 Constructive Discourse. Coding draws on four connected dimensions: the dominant discourse operation, its linguistic realization, the epistemological stance toward knowledge and evidence, and the argumentative organization linking claims with reasons, contextual information, examples, counterexamples, or alternative interpretations. Level assignment depends on convergence across these dimensions. Individual words or grammatical forms function as supporting evidence only when they contribute to the discourse operation characteristic of the level.

The numerical labels L1-L7 indicate ordered developmental positions rather than equal metric intervals. Movement within one level may increase precision, evidential density, and rhetorical control, while movement across a qualitative threshold changes the kind of epistemic work performed by the text. A practical assessment therefore asks what operation the writer sustains and justifies, how language realizes that operation, and what relation to knowledge is implied by the argument. This principle also prevents specialist terminology or sophisticated style from serving as automatic proxies for critical discourse.

L1, Descriptive Discourse, records direct perceptual description. The writer identifies visible qualities or immediately observable features through predominantly everyday language. The text can be accurate and detailed, yet observation remains the endpoint of the argument. Causal relations are undeveloped, disciplinary concepts carry limited analytical weight, and

evaluative claims have little explicit justification. The primary assessment cue is therefore the status of perception: visible properties are reported without a sustained explanation of their art-historical significance.

L2, Expository Discourse, introduces disciplinary vocabulary and established knowledge. Terms, dates, categories, stylistic labels, and definitions appear as recognized content, usually through definitional or factual exposition. The developmental gain lies in entry into the professional language of the field. Analytical status begins only when concepts organize explicit relations among evidence, context, and interpretation. L2 therefore captures terminological command and knowledge exposition while leaving the explanatory potential of concepts largely implicit.

L3, Analytical Discourse, begins when concepts become tools for explanation. Causal, functional, symbolic, or historical relations are made explicit, and the paragraph usually contains a claim linked to a relevant reason. Connectives such as because, therefore, reflects, suggests, enables, or constrains may support the structure, although the reasoning relation itself has greater diagnostic value than the presence of a particular connective. Appraisal resources become more visible as the writer evaluates relationships among form, context, and meaning [2, p. 100].

L4, Comparative Discourse, expands analysis across cases, periods, cultural traditions, or conceptual frames. Comparison acquires developmental value when it produces an explanatory contrast that changes interpretation. Heteroglossic organization becomes more prominent because the writer keeps several positions active at the same time and relates them through attribution, contrast, or contextualization. The epistemological advance lies in recognition that the same art-historical phenomenon can be organized differently when the analytical frame changes, a movement consistent with W. G. Perry's account of contextualized judgment [4, p. 10].

L5, Evaluative Discourse, shifts attention from the application of a framework to examination of its assumptions and limits. The writer can ask what a concept presupposes, which evidence supports an interpretation, where a category loses explanatory power, and how historical or cultural conditions shape its relevance. Calibrated modality, hedging, attribution, and metalinguistic reference become important because claims are related more carefully to evidence. The framework itself becomes an explicit object of evaluation, corresponding to the evidence-dependent and context-sensitive judgment described by P. M. King and K. S. Kitchener [3, p. 44].

L6, Critical Discourse, develops a documented critical stance toward the historical, ideological, or power-related conditions organizing an analytical framework, scholarly narrative, or evaluative standard. A sustained passage links a framework, its presupposition, a critical claim, and supporting evidence or a counterexample. Counterposition gains analytical value when it is warranted by art-historical material. N. Fairclough's relation between discourse and social practice provides the conceptual basis for examining how apparently neutral categories participate in wider structures of knowledge and power [1, p. 51].

L7, Constructive Discourse, adds a metacritical and reconstructive operation. The writer reflects on the limits of the critical position already developed, holds competing frameworks in view, and proposes a reasoned synthesis, alternative conceptualization, or productive new question. Several theoretical voices can be incorporated while the writer retains responsibility for judgment. The level therefore combines reflexivity with epistemological creativity: critique becomes the basis for a provisional reconstruction that remains open to reevaluation as evidence and context develop [3, p. 44].

Table 1. Seven-level SCDDS assessment framework

Level	Dominant discourse operation	Observable linguistic evidence	Epistemological criterion	Primary assessment cue
L1 Descriptive	Reports perceptual features	Everyday lexis; simple coordination; minimal evaluation	Observation treated as sufficient knowledge	What is visible is stated
L2 Expository	Names and defines disciplinary knowledge	Professional terms; definitional clauses; factual exposition	Knowledge treated as established content	Terminology appears; sustained reasoning remains limited
L3 Analytical	Explains relations and causes	Causal links; interpretive verbs; claim–reason structure	Knowledge understood as an interconnected system	Concepts function as analytical tools
L4 Comparative	Relates cases or frameworks	Comparative constructions; attribution; contrast; emerging heteroglossia	Multiple contextualized viewpoints are recognized	Comparison generates explanatory difference
L5 Evaluative	Assesses assumptions and limitations	Modality; hedging; metalinguistic reference; evidence calibration	Judgment is contextual and evidence-dependent	The analytical framework becomes an object of evaluation
L6 Critical	Critiques framework, narrative, or standard	Counterposition; denial; counterexamples; framework–presupposition–critique–evidence chain	Knowledge production is examined historically and socially	A documented critical stance is sustained
L7 Constructive	Builds a reflexive synthesis or alternative	Multiple attributed voices; metacritical qualification; synthetic argument	Judgment remains revisable under epistemic uncertainty	Critique is turned toward the writer's own framework and rebuilt constructively

The scale makes two preliminary distinctions that are essential for reliable assessment. L1 and L2 differ in disciplinary access: L1 relies on perceptual language, whereas L2 demonstrates entry into the vocabulary and established knowledge of the field. L2 and L3 differ in function: terminology at L2 names or defines, while concepts at L3 generate explanation. L3 and L4 differ in analytical scope: L3 organizes relations within one principal frame, whereas L4 coordinates at least two cases or perspectives and makes their relation interpretively productive. These boundaries keep the model focused on discourse operations rather than surface sophistication.

The first qualitative transition, L2→L3, is the movement from naming to analysis. At this threshold professional vocabulary changes function. A term begins to organize an inference about the artwork, historical process, or interpretive problem. The assessor therefore looks for an explicit

causal, functional, symbolic, or historical relation supported by relevant reasoning. Connective insertion by itself carries limited diagnostic weight; the decisive evidence is the explanatory relation. The emphasis on function accords with contemporary coding research, which treats observable discourse actions as more informative than isolated surface markers [6, p. 1].

The second transition, L4→L5, moves from comparative application to framework questioning and represents the central critical threshold of SCDDS. L4 can use several frameworks flexibly; L5 makes the conditions of those frameworks visible by examining historical formation, conceptual presuppositions, evidential limits, and the experiences each category foregrounds. Linguistic positioning becomes especially important because evaluation requires the writer to calibrate certainty, acknowledge alternatives, and mark distance from inherited claims. Appraisal-based instruction in undergraduate writing demonstrates the pedagogical relevance of these resources for stronger evaluative engagement [8, p. 22].

The third transition, L6→L7, moves from critique to construction. L6 can expose and substantiate limitations in an established interpretation. L7 additionally turns reflexive attention toward the critical lens used in that exposure and assumes responsibility for proposing an alternative synthesis or conceptual reframing. The advanced operation therefore combines metacritical awareness, evidential control, and reconstructive judgment. The upper stages of reflective judgment described by P. M. King and K. S. Kitchener provide a useful coordinate because conclusions remain reasoned and revisable under conditions of epistemic uncertainty [3, p. 44].

The art-historical setting gives the model a discipline-specific profile. Critical writing in arts programmes develops at the intersection of visual evidence, contextual research, and academic argument. J. Baggott-Brown's analysis of critical studies assessment highlights the need for inclusive criteria that connect academic writing with the modes of inquiry familiar to arts students [9, p. 145]. F.-A. Norton's study of arts-based research competences across three European higher education contexts similarly links active artistic inquiry with the development of critical thinking [10, p. 142]. SCDDS addresses the assessment side of this problem by evaluating the complexity of interpretive operations across diverse rhetorical forms.

A practical coding protocol follows directly from the model. The preferred unit is a meaningful discourse segment, usually a paragraph or coherent group of sentences performing one identifiable argumentative operation. The coder first identifies the operation, then checks linguistic evidence, epistemological positioning, and organization of support. The assigned level reflects the highest operation sustained and justified across the segment. When a text contains segments at different levels, the profile can be retained for longitudinal analysis. Frequency distributions, transition matrices, and proportions of texts reaching a threshold are especially compatible with the ordinal structure of the scale.

The same architecture supports formative assessment. Feedback can be framed through the next qualitative transition: an L2 writer can be guided to convert terminology into an explanatory relation; an L4 writer can be asked to examine the assumptions that organize a comparison; an L6 writer can be directed toward reflexive reconstruction. Dialogic teaching provides compatible instructional conditions because reasoning becomes public, challengeable, and extendable through interaction. N. Mercer's account of exploratory talk [5, p. 153] and the classroom moves analyzed by R. Cui and P. Teo [7, p. 1] clarify how teacher questioning can stimulate these operations while the SCDDS score remains attached to the student's demonstrated written performance.

Research use requires explicit safeguards. Coders need common definitions, anchor examples, and calibration, with double coding and inter-rater agreement advisable for empirical comparison. Content knowledge and language proficiency also influence the evidence available in a text, so interpretation should document cases where factual limitations or linguistic difficulty constrain the realization of reasoning. Construct validity depends on a clear boundary: SCDDS

assesses developmental complexity in written critical discourse in art history. Broader constructs such as general critical-thinking ability, creativity, aesthetic sensitivity, and overall disciplinary achievement require additional measures.

CONCLUSION

The seven-level SCDDS provides a compact developmental framework for assessing how students use discourse in art history. The sequence progresses from perceptual description and disciplinary exposition through analysis and comparison to evaluation, critique, and constructive metareflection. Linguistic markers supply evidence, while the level decision rests on the discourse operation, structure of justification, and epistemological stance sustained by the text. The model therefore distinguishes performances that can appear superficially similar, including correct terminology and analysis, comparison and evaluation of the comparative frame, critical vocabulary and warranted critique, and critique and constructive synthesis.

Three transitions have the greatest diagnostic value. L2→L3 marks the conversion of professional vocabulary into an analytical tool; L4→L5 marks explicit examination of the assumptions and limits of the interpretive framework; L6→L7 marks the movement from documented critique toward reflexive reconstruction. These thresholds support research coding, longitudinal tracking, and formative feedback because each one identifies a specific change in the epistemic work performed by a text. Cross-level variation across tasks remains an expected feature of performance, so learner-level conclusions require repeated observations across topics and occasions.

The model offers an operational starting point for empirical validation in art history education. Further studies should examine inter-rater reliability, sensitivity to task design, transfer across art-historical topics, and cross-linguistic adaptation, as well as relations between SCDDS levels and independent measures of critical writing or disciplinary learning. Its principal methodological contribution lies in making the proposed developmental construct explicit and observable while preserving the interpretive plurality characteristic of art-historical inquiry.

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